

ANGOLA 2022 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Angola is a constitutional republic. In August the ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola party won presidential and legislative elections with 51 percent of the vote. The ruling party's presidential candidate, João Lourenço, took the oath of office for a five-year term in September, and the party retained a majority in the National Assembly. Domestic and international observers reported polling throughout the country was peaceful and generally credible. Observers, however, criticized the lack of an independent National Electoral Commission and the lack of transparency in the electoral process, noting that the ruling party benefited from biased media coverage and access.

The national police, controlled by the Ministry of Interior, are responsible for internal security and law enforcement. The Criminal Investigation Services, also under the Ministry of Interior, are responsible for preventing and investigating domestic crimes. The Expatriate and Migration Services and the Border Guard Police within the Ministry of Interior are responsible for law enforcement relating to migration. The state intelligence and security service reports directly to the presidency and investigates state security matters. The Angolan Armed Forces also have domestic security responsibilities, including border security, expulsion of irregular migrants, and small-scale actions against separatist groups, such as in Cabinda, the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were reports that members of the security forces committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: unlawful or arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings; cases of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by government security forces; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary detention; political prisoners or detainees; serious restrictions on free expression and the press, including violence, threats of violence or unjustified arrests against journalists, censorship, and enforcement or threat to enforce criminal libel laws; interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly; serious government corruption; lack of investigation of and accountability for

gender-based violence; and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex persons.

The government took significant steps to identify, investigate, prosecute, and punish officials who committed abuses as well as those who were involved in corruption. Nevertheless, accountability for human rights abuses was limited due to a lack of checks and balances, lack of institutional capacity, a culture of impunity, and government corruption.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings and sometimes used excessive force in maintaining stability. The national police and Angolan Armed Forces have internal mechanisms to investigate whether security force killings were justifiable and pursue prosecutions.

On May 26, several unidentified members of a security force composed of members of the National Police, Cambambe Municipal Command, Angolan Armed Forces, and China Gezhouba Group Company security fired on unarmed striking workers at the Caculo Cabaça Dam project in Cuanza Norte Province, killing three workers and injuring eight additional workers. Video circulating on social media showed a line of unidentified security personnel on a road approximately 150 yards away from a group of workers, standing in the road, unarmed, with their hands raised. Shots could be heard in the audio and at least one of the workers appeared to be hit by the gunfire. The Cuanza Norte Provincial Command of the National Police issued a press statement confirming the deaths and injuries, saying “the forces responsible for maintaining local order” responded to workers vandalizing property at the construction site in protest of poor labor conditions at the project run by the Chinese company.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses

The constitution and law prohibit all forms of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, but the government did not always enforce these prohibitions.

Periodic reports continued of beatings and other abuses both on the way to and inside police stations during interrogations. The government acknowledged that at times members of the security forces used excessive force when apprehending individuals. Police authorities openly condemned some acts of violence or excessive force against individuals and asked that victims report abuses to the national police or the Office of the Public Defender.

In March, 10 social activists were arrested while giving a lecture on local sustainable development at Agostinho Neto Primary School in Malanje. The group told reporters that they were taken to a police station and beaten for three hours by agents of the Criminal Investigation Services.

On August 27-28, several activists were reportedly beaten with clubs and rifle butts during their arrest and later at the police station by members of the Rapid Intervention force of the National Police in Lobito, Benguela Province. Among those arrested, a journalist for the nongovernmental organization (NGO) OMUNGA, Avisto Mbota, claimed he was handcuffed and beaten unconscious, and later at the police station was held down and beaten again, and told to hold a grenade with his mouth, a request which he refused.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center conditions were harsh and life threatening due to overcrowding, a lack of medical care, corruption, and violence.

Abusive Physical Conditions: Prisons had a total capacity for 21,000 inmates but held approximately 25,000 inmates, with approximately 10,000 of those inmates in pretrial detention. Authorities frequently held pretrial detainees with sentenced inmates. Authorities also held short-term detainees with those serving long-term sentences for violent crimes, especially in provincial prisons. Inmates who were

unable to pay court-ordered fines remained in prison after completing their sentence or while awaiting release warrants issued by higher courts. Some offenders, including violent offenders, reported paying fines and bribes to secure their freedom, but it was unclear how prevalent this practice was.

Prison conditions varied widely between urban and rural areas. Prisons in rural areas were less crowded and had better rehabilitation, training, and reintegration services. There were no reports of deaths in prisons, but there were reports of inmates becoming sick due to the poor conditions of the prisons, including with COVID-19. Local NGOs stated prisons did not always provide adequate prison services, such as medical care, sanitation, potable water, or food, and it was customary for families to bring food to prisoners.

On June 13, Ombudsperson Florbela Araújo visited Viana jail, in Luanda Province, and said the facility was overcrowded and had excess cases of persons in pretrial detention. The facility had a capacity for 2,384, although there were 3,248 inmates, of whom 2,609 were in pretrial detention. She also expressed concern regarding the poor health condition of some inmates and noticed the laboratory for clinical analysis was not operational.

Administration: The government investigated and monitored prison and detention center conditions.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted visits to prisons by independent local observers. Nevertheless, civil society organizations faced difficulties in contacting detainees, and prison authorities undermined civil society work by impeding their ability to enter the prisons.

In December 2021, members of the Provincial Human Rights Committee of Bié visited three jails. The committee's representative, Aldino Salumbo, said prisons were overcrowded and there were several cases of pretrial detention.

In February the ombudsperson visited the jail in Caboxa, Bengo Province.

Improvements: During the year three additional videoconference rooms were added to detention facilities. These were used for virtual meetings between inmates and relatives or lawyers.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. The government did not always observe these requirements.

According to several NGO and civil society sources, police arbitrarily arrested individuals without due process and routinely detained persons who participated, or were about to participate, in antigovernment protests, although the constitution protects the right to protest. While they often released detainees after a few hours, police at times charged them with crimes.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law requires a magistrate or judge to issue a warrant before an arrest may be made, although a person caught committing an offense may be arrested immediately without a warrant. Authorities, however, did not always procure warrants before making an arrest.

By law prosecutors must inform detainees of the legal basis for their detention within 48 hours. NGO sources reported authorities often did not respect the law. If prosecutors are unable to determine whether there is a legal basis for the detention within 48 hours, prosecutors have the authority to release the person from detention. Depending on the seriousness of the case, prosecutors may require the detained person to submit to one or more pretrial procedures prescribed by law, such as posting bail, periodic appearance before authorities, or house arrest.

If prosecutors determine a legal basis exists for the detention, a detained person may be held in pretrial detention for up to four months without charge and up to 12 months before a judge is required to rule on the matter. Cases of special complexity regarding crimes for which conviction is punishable by eight or more years allow for pretrial detention without charge for up to six months, and up to 14 months before a judge is required to rule on the case. By law the period of pretrial detention counts as time served in fulfillment of a sentence of imprisonment.

The law states that all detainees have the right to a lawyer, either chosen by them or appointed by the government on a pro bono basis. The lack of lawyers in

certain provinces at times impeded the right to a lawyer. There was an insufficient number to handle the volume of criminal cases, and the geographic distribution of lawyers was a problem, since most lawyers were concentrated in Luanda. Lawyers and NGOs noted that even in Luanda, most indigent defendants did not have access to lawyers during their first appearance before a judicial authority or during their trial. When a lawyer is unavailable, a judge may appoint a clerk of the court to represent the defendant, but clerks of the court often lacked the necessary training to provide an adequate defense. In June research was published on detained women in six provinces that was conducted in 2020 by the Justice, Peace and Democracy Association. It showed only 34 percent of women had access to a lawyer on the first appearance before a public prosecutor.

A functioning but ineffective bail system, widely used for minor crimes, existed. Prisoners and their families reported that prison officials demanded bribes to release prisoners.

The law allows family members prompt access to detainees, but prison officials occasionally ignored this right or made it conditional upon payment of a bribe. The law allows detainees to be held incommunicado for up to 48 hours until being presented to a public prosecutor, except they may communicate with their lawyer or a family member. There were instances in which lawyers were not allowed to communicate with detainees during the 48-hour period.

Arbitrary Arrest: During the year there were instances in which security forces reacted violently to public demonstrations against the government and detained protesters. The visible presence of security forces was often enough to deter significantly what the government deemed unlawful demonstrations. In certain cases, members of groups organizing protests were arrested at their homes prior to the protest.

On March 19, following a clash between two opposing political parties in Sanza Pombo, Uige Province, 26 persons, all members of the main opposition party, were arrested and held for four months without trial before being released for lack of evidence of their participation.

On September 13-14, two political activists were arrested without a warrant by

unidentified armed police at their homes in Luanda Province and held until September 19 without communication with their lawyer for alleged charges of defamation of the president on social media, which were later dismissed.

Pretrial Detention: Excessively long pretrial detention continued to be a serious problem. An inadequate number of judges and poor communication among authorities contributed to the problem. Many prisoners were held in pretrial detention longer than permitted under law, which ranges from four to 14 months depending on the severity and complexity of the alleged crime. In some cases, authorities held inmates in prison for up to five years in pretrial detention. The length of pretrial detention at times equaled or exceeded the maximum sentence for the alleged crime. The government often did not release detainees confined beyond the legal time limit, claiming previous releases of pretrial detainees had resulted in an increase in crime.

In her visits to prisons, Ombudsperson Araújo noted cases of delays of release warrants in Caboxa jail, Bengo Province, and cases of excessive pretrial detention in Viana jail, Luanda Province.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent and impartial judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality. The judicial system was affected by institutional weaknesses, including political influence in the decision-making process.

There were long trial delays at the Supreme Court, in part because it remained the only appellate court in the country at the beginning of the year. A 2015 law established another level of appellate courts to reduce delays. During the year, three of these courts were inaugurated in Luanda, Benguela, and Lubango, recruited judges, and personnel began operating. Criminal courts also had a large backlog of cases that resulted in major delays in hearings. In March court cases were also delayed by striking Supreme Court clerks, which effectively shut down the courts for several weeks.

The national police and the Angolan Armed Forces have internal court systems that generally remained closed to outside scrutiny. Although members of these

organizations may be tried under their internal regulations, cases that include violations of criminal or civil laws may also fall under the jurisdiction of provincial courts. Both the Attorney General's Office and the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights have civilian oversight responsibilities over military courts.

Trial Procedures

The constitution and law provide for the right to a fair and public trial, and the judiciary generally enforced this right.

At times, authorities did not inform defendants of the charges levied against them in detail within 48 hours of their detention as required by law. According to the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, all public defenders are licensed lawyers, but at times, especially in rural locations, defendants were represented by clerks of the court due to lack of availability of lawyers. Defense lawyers did not always have access to prosecution files and evidence in a timely manner to prepare a defense. Defense lawyers were not always given adequate facilities to prepare case work.

A separate juvenile court hears cases of children between the ages of 12 and 16 accused of committing a criminal offense. Children older than 16 accused of committing a criminal offense are tried in regular courts. In many rural municipalities, there is no provision for juvenile courts, so offenders as young as 12 may be tried as adults.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were reports of political prisoners.

On January 12, activist Luther Campos "King" was detained at his home in Luanda without a warrant following a protest that had turned violent two days before. King was charged with inciting vandalism, rebellion, insult against the president, association with wrongdoers, and of criminal participation in the destruction of a Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) local office. His trial began on December 9. Several witnesses were heard by the court, but as of year's end no verdict had been reached.

On February 25, more than a year after his arrest, Jose Mateus Zecamutchima, leader of the Lunda Tchokwe Protectorate Movement, was sentenced to four years and six months in prison on charges of instigating collective disobedience that led to a deadly January 2021 clash between protesters and police in Cafunfo, Lunda Norte Province. He was held for seven months before being formally indicted. Media sources viewed his detention and conviction as politically motivated, stating that he was in a different province at the time of the clash, while the government claimed his separatist speeches had led to the gathering and resulting violent clash.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Damages for human rights abuses may be sought in provincial courts, appeals courts, and the Supreme Court. The law allows victims of human rights abuses to seek compensation from the state. The rules provide that the state must compensate victims who are illegally detained or arrested, are under excessively long pretrial detention, are not released in due time against a legal provision or a court decision or are victims of a gross judicial error. Public agents responsible for actions that abuse human rights should in turn compensate the state. During the year, there were no known cases where the state compensated victims.

Property Seizure and Restitution

The government evicted persons from their places of residence or seized their property without due process or adequate restitution. On April 9, hundreds of families residing on land adjacent to the newly constructed airport on the outskirts of the capital city Luanda were evicted and their homes demolished with no warning. Victims claimed government workers supported by the National Police arrived at 4 a.m. and began demolishing homes, claiming they were on government-reserved land. Documenting land ownership often takes years to complete, resulting in many residents not having a clear title to the land or home they have lived in for many years.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution and law prohibit the arbitrary or unlawful interference of privacy,

family, home, or correspondence, but the government did not always respect these prohibitions. Civil organizations and politically active individuals, including government critics, members of opposition parties, and journalists, complained that the government monitored their activities and membership on social media and allegedly used spyware to monitor their whereabouts and telephone conversations. These groups also frequently complained of threats and harassment based on their affiliations with groups that were purportedly or explicitly antigovernment.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media

The constitution and law provide for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, but the government did not always respect this right.

Freedom of Expression: Individuals were increasingly able to use private media and social media platforms to openly criticize government policies and practices. Individuals reported practicing self-censorship but generally were able to criticize government policies without fear of direct reprisal. Social media was widely used in the larger cities and provided an open forum for discussion. There were instances where civil society members were not able to assemble and express their opinions in public.

On January 14, activist Tanaice Neutro was arrested in front of the prison-hospital São Paulo in Luanda for streaming a live video protesting “King’s” arrest and highlighting the poor prison conditions for King (see section 1.e., Political Prisoners and Detainees). On October 12, Neutro was convicted on charges of insulting the state and its symbols and given a 15-month suspended sentence.

Violence and Harassment: Reporting on corruption, poor governance, and human rights abuses were the primary reasons for attacks against journalists, which occurred with impunity. Journalists reported more incidents of violence, harassment, and intimidation compared with the previous year. Other journalists reported harassment by authorities while covering peaceful demonstrations and

election rallies.

Journalists covering land topics were targeted during the year. On April 13, police surrounded reporters who were covering evictions and home demolitions in Luanda, taking their equipment and allegedly shoving and hitting them with a baton.

On August 17, *Voice of America* reporter Coque Mukuta was detained by the National Police while covering a peaceful public demonstration in Luanda. His cell phone and professional credentials were confiscated, and he was driven around in a police vehicle for three hours before being released.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other

Media, Including Online Media: Private television media outlets seized by the state in 2020 due to corruption investigations remained under government control, with no announced plan for privatization. In September, one of the seized stations – TV Palanca – was shut down and all staff and equipment transferred to state-run Public Television of Angola. Three independent stations told to cease broadcasting in 2021 remained off the air. The president appoints the leadership of all major state-owned media outlets, and state control of these outlets often led to one-sided reporting. State news outlets, including Angolan Public Television, Radio Nacional, and the *Jornal de Angola* newspaper, strongly favored the ruling party and often did not cover social problems reflecting poor governance or voices critical of the government. During the campaign period ahead of the August 24 election, opposition parties received significantly less coverage on state media than the ruling MPLA party, and it was often difficult to distinguish between communications of the government and those of the ruling party. Journalists working for government-controlled outlets reported threats of job losses if they did not comply with the editorial narrative of the MPLA party.

In May the Ministry of Telecommunications, Information Technology, and Social Communication asked 15 internet-based media outlets to show proof of licensed activity. Several journalists considered the move a way to control and intimidate those outlets.

The Regulatory Entity for Social Communication (ERCA) is a body composed of

11 counselors designated by political parties represented in the parliament, the government, and journalists. ERCA's responsibility is to safeguard press freedom and lawful media activity and to issue regulations and decisions on those matters. Journalists and opposition political parties criticized ERCA for being controlled by the ruling MPLA and for issuing regulations that favored the government.

The Ethics and Credentialing Commission is a body exclusively composed of journalists that is authorized to license and delicense journalists. In July the Ministry of Telecommunications, Information Technology, and Social Communication opened an office to support commission operations. As of October 2021, any media outlets allowing a journalist to work without credentials faced a fine of approximately 23,100 kwanza (\$52), which was approximately a journalist's monthly salary. Journalists reported practicing self-censorship for political and financial reasons.

The minister of social communication, the spokesperson of the presidency, and the national director of information maintained significant decision-making authority over media. It was commonly understood these individuals actively vetted news stories in the state-controlled print, television, and radio media and exercised considerable authority over some privately owned outlets. State-controlled media rarely published or broadcast stories critical of the ruling party, government officials, or government policies.

Several journalists, members of civil society, and opposition party members expressed concerns before the electoral campaign began on July 24 that the public media was dedicating most of its news space to the MPLA, resulting in a lack of balanced coverage of the different candidates.

Libel/Slander Laws: Defamation is a crime punishable by imprisonment or a fine. Unlike cases in which defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty, defendants in defamation cases have the burden of proving their innocence by providing evidence of the validity of the allegedly damaging material.

Several journalists in print media, radio, and political blogs faced libel and defamation lawsuits. Journalists complained the government used libel laws to limit their ability to report on corruption and nepotistic practices, while the

government stated that some journalists abused their positions and published inaccurate stories regarding government officials without verifying the facts or providing the accused with the right of reply. The NGO Committee to Protect Journalists cited criminal defamation and insult investigations underway into journalists Escrivão José and Óscar Constantino in response to their investigative reporting on politicians and public figures. In June, José was questioned by police and named as a formal suspect on defamation charges stemming from his reporting of corruption allegations in a land deal by a public official. In July, Constantino, a reporter for Radio Ecclésia, was acquitted of defamation charges stemming from a 2020 news article regarding a public official's resignation amid an alleged sex scandal.

Internet Freedom

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content. There were no credible reports that the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal oversight.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution and law provide for the right of peaceful assembly and association, but the government did not always respect these rights.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The law requires written notification to the local administrator and police three days before public assemblies are to be held. The law does not require government permission to hold public assemblies, but it permits authorities to restrict or stop assemblies in public spaces within 109 yards of public, military, detention, diplomatic, or consular buildings for security reasons. The law also requires public assemblies to start after 7 p.m. on weekdays and 1 p.m. on Saturdays.

On May 21, in Cabinda Province, National Police encircled a building, preventing the NGOs OMUNGA and Associação para Desenvolvimento da Cultura e Direitos Humanos from holding a conference discussing pathways to peace in the region. The Ministry of Interior endorsed the decision arguing that despite being registered nationally, OMUNGA was not based in Cabinda and required additional

authorization from the provincial government to hold meetings.

The government permitted demonstrations, including antigovernment protests, but at times prohibited events based on perceived or claimed security considerations. Police and administrators did not interfere with progovernment gatherings. Politically unaffiliated groups intending to criticize the government or government leaders often encountered the presence of police who prevented them from holding their event or limited their march route. In such cases, authorities claimed the timing or venue requested was problematic, that proper authorities had not been notified, or that those protests put social stability and security at risk.

Freedom of Association

Extensive delays in the NGO registration process continued to be a problem. NGOs that had not yet received registration were allowed to operate. At times the government arbitrarily restricted the activities of associations it considered subversive by refusing to grant permits for projects and other activities. Authorities generally permitted opposition parties to organize and hold meetings.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

The constitution and law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation. The government at times restricted these related rights.

In-country Movement: Document checkpoints in domestic airports and on roads throughout the country were common. Reports by local NGOs suggested that, despite an incremental drop in cases, some police officers continued to extort money from civilians at checkpoints and during regular traffic stops. Reports from the diamond-mining provinces of Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul stated some government agents restricted the movements of local communities.

e. Protection of Refugees

The government generally cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, and asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, but the government did not fully implement the law. The law provides specific procedures for the submission of an asylum application and guidance on the determination of refugee status. UNHCR and several NGOs, however, reported that asylum seekers did not have a mechanism to apply for or resolve their status. A 2015 law changed the role of the Committee for the Recognition of the Right to Asylum, the prior implementing mechanism to identify, verify, and legalize asylum seekers, to that of an advisory board. The government had not put into practice a mechanism to adjudicate asylum cases in the committee's place. The law also authorized the creation of reception centers for refugees and asylum seekers where they were to receive assistance until the government decides on their cases, but the government had not yet established these centers.

Abuse of Migrants and Refugees: There were reports throughout the year that Lunda Norte provincial authorities exerted pressure on irregular migrants to return to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Under the law, authorities should issue refugee cards with a five-year validity. According to UNHCR, the government had not issued or renewed refugee cards since 2015, and no refugee possessed an unexpired, government-issued refugee card during the year. The minister of interior told UN officials that the government would begin to fully implement the law when COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, but despite the lifting of restrictions during the year, no refugee cards were renewed. Refugees reported a general lack of acceptance of the refugee card and lack of knowledge concerning the rights it was intended to safeguard.

Freedom of Movement: UNHCR, NGOs, and refugees reported restrictions on freedom of movement in Lunda Norte Province. Refugees also reported periodic restrictions on freedom of movement from their resettlement site in Lovua, Lunda Norte Province, and cited such restrictions as a factor motivating them to return to

the DRC.

Employment: There were reports that the government imposed restrictions on refugees' ability to work. The law does not allow refugees to work and restricted refugees from obtaining business licenses. A regulation restricts refugees from obtaining the business license required to own and operate a business. Refugees often faced difficulty obtaining employment due to their inability to obtain legal documents required to work in the formal sector. Authorities continued to harass asylum seekers and refugees working in the informal economy.

Access to Basic Services: Persons with recognized refugee status could at times obtain public services. The government had not implemented key elements of the 2015 asylum law allowing refugee and asylum seekers' access to basic services. UNHCR, NGOs, and refugees, reported that urban refugees faced difficulty accessing public services such as health care and education. Expired documentation prevented refugees from owning land or vehicles in their name, purchasing cellular SIM cards, obtaining business licenses, obtaining birth certificates for children born in country, and accessing education beyond primary school.

Durable Solutions: In July the government cooperated with UNHCR and supported an organized voluntary repatriation of 88 Congolese refugees from Lunda Norte Province to the DRC. This was the first repatriation since they were halted in 2020 due to COVID-19. The government through the Migration and Foreigners Service and the Ministry of Social Action, Family, and Women's Promotion (Ministry of Social Assistance) participated in the screening phase to ensure that those to be repatriated were refugees, processed the related repatriation documentation, facilitated family reunification for the purpose of returning, verified that those returning were on the Voluntary Repatriation manifest, and signed the manifest at the borders for handover to counterparts on the DRC side.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

In 2021, due to a severe, prolonged drought in the southern provinces, approximately 15,000 internally displaced persons congregated around feeding centers in Cunene, Huila, and Namibe Provinces. NGOs reported that the majority

of these persons returned to their places of origin as result of international humanitarian assistance; government action to lower prices of basic food items, and the Kwenda social assistance program.

g. Stateless Persons

The government estimated there were more than 12 million unregistered citizens in the country. Children of undocumented foreign parents born in the country were at risk of statelessness due to their parents' inability to register their births. In June, the government announced it had registered six million persons under a major birth registration program it began in 2019.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution and law provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: On August 24, the government held presidential and legislative elections, in which the ruling MPLA won its fifth consecutive election with 51 percent of the vote, re-electing João Lourenço to a second term as the country's third president since independence. The MPLA lost its supermajority in the National Assembly but retained a majority with 124 of the 220 seats. The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), the largest opposition party, won an unprecedented 90 seats, up from 51 in the 2017 election, and for the first time won the overall vote count in Cabinda, Zaire, and Luanda Provinces. For the first time, voting abroad at select embassies took place with plans to expand the practice in future elections.

New voter registration procedures were widely publicized in urban areas and resulted in more than 14 million registered voters, up from 9.3 million in 2017. Despite registering five million more voters than in 2017, overall voter turnout fell by more than a half-million voters in the August 24 election, resulting in a voter turnout of only 44.8 percent of the registered electorate of 14.4 million voters. This was significantly lower than in previous elections: 76 percent (2017), 72

percent (2012), and 81 percent (2008). Opposition parties criticized the slow rollout of registration centers in rural areas, changing locations of polling stations, and the presence of deceased voters remaining on the rolls. Domestic and international observers reported polling throughout the country was peaceful, orderly, and generally well organized. Observation missions criticized the lack of political independence of the National Electoral Commission (CNE) and its failure to publish voter rolls 30 days prior to election day. Observers also noted that media access and coverage, as well as institutional advantages, heavily favored the ruling party and did not foster equal participation. Opposition parties complained to the Constitutional Court regarding aspects of the electoral process, including the CNE's lack of transparent decision making on key election procedures and perceived irregularities during the provincial-level vote count.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The ruling MPLA party dominated all political institutions, giving its members advantages in obtaining civil service and government leadership jobs. For the August 24 elections, the CNE reduced the number of election observers from 3,000 in 2017 to 2,000, which several observation missions noted was too few to cover the 13,212 polling stations. The CNE continued the practice of limiting observers to a single province. Domestic observer NGOs were limited to no more than three observers per province, and some NGOs complained they did not receive credentials despite applying early. Political parties must be represented in all 18 provinces, but only the MPLA, UNITA, and Broad Convergence for the Salvation of Angola Electoral Coalition, to a lesser extent, had truly national constituencies. By law no political party may limit party membership based on ethnicity, race, or gender.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No laws limit the participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process, and some did participate.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. The government dismissed and

prosecuted midlevel officials for petty corruption. There were reports of government corruption during the year. The Attorney General's Office continued corruption investigations and brought criminal charges against several midlevel officials. In October, President Lourenço highlighted that during his first term, more than 3,600 declarations of public office holders' assets were turned in to the attorney general versus 188 during the five years before he was elected. Nonetheless, official impunity and the uniform application of anticorruption legislation remained a serious problem.

Corruption: In November the trial of Major Pedro Lussaty and 48 other defendants that began in July concluded with defendants receiving sentences ranging from two to 14 years' imprisonment on charges including embezzlement, fraud, and abuse of authority. Lussaty, detained since 2021, admitted to possession of more than \$62 million dollars diverted from state funds. The trial, according to local analysts, partially revealed the contradictions, mismatched speeds, incompetence, and injustices of the judicial system concerning the fight against corruption.

In March a court sentenced Carlos de São Vicente, former head of the state-owned insurance company AAA Seguros, who was arrested in 2020, to nine years in prison and fined him \$500 million dollars for embezzlement, money laundering, and fraud.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

A variety of domestic and international human rights groups operated throughout the country, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights. Some groups investigating government corruption and human rights abuses alleged government interference in their activities, particularly in provinces outside of Luanda. Civil society organizations and opposition political parties faced difficulties in contacting detainees and doing work in the prisons, despite COVID-19 preventive measures being relaxed during the year.

The law requires NGOs to specify their mandate and areas of activity. The

government used this provision to prevent or discourage established NGOs from engaging in certain activities, especially those that the government deemed politically sensitive. (See also section 2.b.).

The government allowed local NGOs to carry out human rights-related work, but many NGOs reported they were forced to limit the scope of their work because they faced problems registering, were subjected to subtle forms of intimidation, and risked more serious forms of harassment and closure. In May the NGO OMUNGA was prevented by local police in Cabinda Province from holding a conference discussing peace in the region, on grounds that they were not a locally registered organization, despite being registered nationally for several years.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The state-funded Interministerial Commission for the Writing of Human Rights Reports included representatives from various government ministries. Leading civil society members decided not to participate on the commission because they did not believe the commission was independent or effective.

The 10th Commission on Human Rights of the National Assembly is charged with investigating citizen complaints of alleged human rights abuses and makes recommendations to the National Assembly.

An Office of the Ombudsman, with national jurisdiction, existed to mediate between an aggrieved public, including prisoners, and an offending public office or institution. It had neither decision-making nor adjudicative powers but helped citizens obtain access to justice, advised government entities on citizen rights, and published reports. During the year, the government implemented and trained local human rights committees at the provincial, municipal, and communal levels. These committees were composed of government representatives, civil society members, journalists, religious representatives, and traditional authorities. The committees were tasked with gathering information and reporting monthly on human rights matters within their area. Those reports were not publicly available as of year's end.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape, including spousal rape and intimate partner rape, is illegal and punishable by up to 12 years' imprisonment if convicted, depending on aggravating situations. The government did not enforce the law effectively. Limited investigative resources, poor forensic capabilities, and an ineffective judicial system prevented prosecution of most cases. The Ministry of Justice and Human Rights worked with the Ministry of Interior to increase the number of women police officers and to improve police response to rape allegations.

The law criminalizes domestic violence and penalizes offenders with prison sentences of up to eight years and monetary fines, depending on the severity of their crime. The Ministry of Justice and Human Rights maintained a program with the Angolan Bar Association to give free legal assistance to women survivors of domestic abuse and established counseling centers to help families.

According to the Ministry of Social Action, Family, and Women Promotion, during the year there were 2,929 cases reported to the care centers of family-based violence, of which 2,297 victims were women, while the Criminal Investigation Services registered 4,905 cases of domestic violence. Prosecutions were reportedly rare.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment was common and not illegal. It may be prosecuted, however, under assault and battery and defamation statutes, but in practice prosecutions were rare.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

Persons living in rural areas faced more barriers to access of sexual and reproductive health services and postabortion emergency services than urban dwellers due to a lack of resources and health programs in those areas. According to 2015-16 World Health Organization (WHO) data, 62 percent of women between the ages of 15 and 49 made their own informed decisions regarding reproductive

health care, contraceptive use, and sexual relations. Some cultural views, such as that women have a responsibility to bear children, and religious objections to using contraception limited access to reproductive health services. The WHO reported there were four nursing and midwifery personnel per 10,000 inhabitants in the country (2010-18 data). For survivors of sexual violence, the law on domestic violence provides for legal and medical assistance, access to shelter spaces, and priority care assistance to obtain legal evidence of the crime. Emergency contraception was available as clinical management of rape.

According to a 2017 WHO report, the country's maternal mortality rate was 241 deaths per 100,000 live births, which was a significant reduction from the rates of 431 deaths in 2007 and 827 deaths in 2000. High maternal mortality was due to inadequate access to health facilities before, during, and after giving birth, a lack of skilled obstetric care, and early pregnancy. The WHO data reported a high adolescent birth rate of 163 births per 1,000 women between 15 and 19. A UN Population Fund report found that six of 10 teenage girls who abandoned school did so due to pregnancy. According to 2010-19 data, 30 percent of women of reproductive age had their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods. UNICEF reported in 2016 that 50 percent of births in the country were attended by skilled health personnel.

According to an official in the Ministry of Public Administration, Labor, and Social Security, lack of running water and sanitary facilities at some schools disproportionately affected teenage girls, causing them to not attend school during their period. The cumulative effect of lost class time was detrimental to their success in school, leading struggling students to drop out and enter the work force.

Discrimination: Under the constitution and law, women enjoy the same rights and legal status as men. The government, however, did not enforce the law effectively, and societal discrimination against women remained a problem, particularly in rural areas. Customary law prevailed over civil law, particularly in rural areas, and at times had a negative effect on a woman's legal right to inherit property.

The law provides for equal pay for equal work, although women generally held low-level positions. There were legal restrictions on women's employment in

occupations and industries compared to men, including in jobs deemed hazardous, factory jobs, and those in the mining, agriculture, and energy sectors.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

A 2021 revision of the law contained several provisions that criminalize discrimination based on skin color, race, and ethnicity. *The Human Rights National Plan 2020-2022* contains policies to mitigate racial discrimination. Reports of racial or ethnic violence were rare.

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship is derived by birth within the country or from one's parents. Although birth registration is universalized, the government does not register all births immediately. According to the 2014 census, approximately 13.7 million citizens (46 percent of the population) lacked birth registration documents. In June the government announced it had registered six million persons since starting a large-scale birth registration program in 2019. The program, however, was intended to finish by the year's end. On October 9, President Lourenço created the Interministerial Commission for the Identification of the Constraints and Presentation of Solutions for the Expansion of the Process of Birth Registration and Issuance of ID Cards.

The government permitted children to attend school without birth registration, but only through the sixth grade.

Education: Education is tuition-free and compulsory for documented children through the ninth grade. Students in public schools often faced significant additional expenses such as books or irregular fees paid directly to education officials to guarantee a place. When parents were unable to pay the fees, their children were often unable to attend school. The Ministry of Education estimated that one to two million children did not attend school because of a shortage of teachers and schools.

There were reports that parents, especially in more rural areas, were more likely to send boys to school rather than girls. According to UNESCO, enrollment rates were higher for boys than for girls, especially at the secondary level.

Child Abuse: Child abuse was widespread. Reports of physical abuse within the family were commonplace, and local officials largely tolerated abuse due to lack of capacity within institutions to provide appropriate care. The Ministry of Social Assistance offers programs for child abuse victims and other vulnerable children. Nevertheless, nationwide implementation of such programs remained a problem.

In 2020 the Ministry of Culture and the National Institute for Children (INAC) launched a hotline to report violence against children. In March, INAC reported at least 4,700 children had been victims of sexual abuse during the previous 12 months, which was similar to the number it reported in 2021. INAC stated it had launched a campaign in 2021 emphasizing psychosocial support to child victims of sexual abuse and their families, lectures, roundtables, and protests condemning violence against children.

According to the local UNICEF office, there were reports that more than 50,000 children suffered from some form of child abuse.

There were anecdotal reports that some communities abused women and children due to accusations the latter practiced witchcraft. INAC had educational initiatives and emergency programs to assist children accused of witchcraft.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal age for marriage with parental consent is 15 for girls and 16 for boys. The government did not enforce this restriction effectively, and the traditional age of marriage among lower income groups coincided with the onset of puberty.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: Human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children is illegal. Police did not actively enforce laws against commercial sexual exploitation, and local NGOs expressed concern regarding the sexual exploitation of children. The law prohibits the use of children to produce pornography; however, it does not prohibit the procuring or offering of a child for the production of pornography, or the use, procuring, or offering of a child for pornographic performances.

Sexual relations between an adult and a child younger than 12 are considered rape, and conviction carries a potential penalty of eight to 12 years' imprisonment. Sexual relations with a child between the ages of 12 and 17 are considered sexual

abuse, and convicted offenders may receive sentences from two to eight years in prison. The legal age for consensual sex is 18. Limited investigative resources and an inadequate judicial system prevented prosecution of most cases. There were reports of prosecutions during the year.

Displaced Children: Extreme poverty and the economic decline during recent years led to an increase in the number of children living on the street, especially in urban areas of the capital. These children, estimated to number from the hundreds to several thousand, did not have access to health care or education, often resorted to begging or trash picking for survival, and lived in conditions placing them at great risk for exploitation.

Antisemitism

There is a Jewish community of approximately 350 persons, primarily resident Israelis. There were no reports of antisemitic acts.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics

Criminalization: The constitution prohibits all forms of discrimination but does not specifically address sexual orientation or gender identity. In 2021 changes to the penal code took effect that decriminalized same-sex sexual relations and criminalized acts of violence or discrimination based on a person's sexual orientation. Transgender and intersex persons are not specifically covered in the legislation, nor does it recognize same-sex marriage, leading to problems in adoption and family planning, accompanying family into health-care facilities, and obtaining appropriate identity documents.

Violence against LGBTQI+ Persons: Local NGOs reported that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons faced violence and

harassment, and that police often tolerated violence against LGBTQI+ individuals or against those reporting abuse by failing to investigate or prosecute.

Discrimination: Discrimination based on sexual orientation was criminalized in 2021, but LGBTQI+ persons rarely reported incidents to police, and when reported, LGBTQI+ persons asserted that police sometimes refused to register the grievances. LGBTQI+ NGOs assert that societal biases against LGBTQI+ identity result in discrimination in family life, education, health services, and employment. The Ministry of Health continued to collaborate with the National Institute to Fight HIV/AIDS to improve access to health services and sexual education for the LGBTQI+ community.

The Movement EU SOU TRANS Angola reported 10 cases of discrimination against transgender women sex workers in Luanda between 2020 and year's end. The group described eight of the incidents as cases of arbitrary detention due to intolerance and transphobia, one incident of sexual violence by a police officer, and one case of pretrial detention due to charges of sexual abuse of minors.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: The government does not allow individuals to change their gender identity marker on legal and identifying documents to bring them into alignment with their gender identity. Neither is there an option of identifying as “nonbinary/intersex/gender no-conforming” or other gender identity.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals: Involuntary or coercive medical or psychological practices specifically targeting LGBTQI+ individuals occurred but were not well documented. A transgender person reported an involuntary “exorcism,” for instance, because of perceived sexual identity.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: There were no legal restrictions on freedom of expression, association, or peaceful assembly placed on LGBTQI+ groups, some of which have legal recognition as NGOs in the country.

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities, but the government did not effectively enforce these prohibitions. The constitution grants persons with disabilities full rights without restriction and calls on the government to adopt national policies to prevent disability; treat, rehabilitate, and integrate persons with disabilities; support their families; remove obstacles to their mobility; educate society regarding disability; and encourage learning and training opportunities for persons with disabilities.

The law also institutes a quota system to encourage the public and private sectors to employ more persons with disabilities, with the public-sector quota set at 4 percent of total employees and the private-sector quota at 2 percent. The government official responsible for overseeing programs to promote inclusion for persons with disabilities acknowledged that both the private and public sectors failed to meet the quota system established by law. Persons with disabilities included more than 80,000 survivors of land mines and other explosive remnants of war. Because of limited government resources and uneven availability, only 30 percent of persons with disabilities were able to take advantage of state-provided services such as physical rehabilitation, schooling, training, or counseling.

Women with disabilities were reported to be vulnerable to sexual abuse and abandonment when pregnant. The Ministry of Social Assistance sought to address problems facing persons with disabilities, including veterans with disabilities, and several government entities supported programs to assist individuals disabled by landmine incidents.

Government inaction to enforce these laws limited the ability of persons with disabilities to participate fully in civil life. Accommodations were made in the August national elections, however, to assist persons with disabilities to fully participate.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Discrimination against those with HIV or AIDS is illegal, but lack of enforcement

allowed employers to discriminate against persons with HIV. There were no media reports of violence against persons with HIV. Reports from local and international health NGOs suggested discrimination against persons with HIV was common. The government's National Institute to Fight HIV/AIDS included sensitivity and antidiscrimination training for its employees when they test and counsel HIV patients.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for most workers to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The law prohibits some forms of antiunion discrimination but does not explicitly prohibit employer interference with union activity. Legal restrictions limit these rights. The law does not permit members of the armed forces, police, firefighters, members of sovereign bodies, and public prosecutors to form and join independent unions or initiate strikes. The government generally did not effectively enforce labor laws. Labor courts functioned but were overburdened by a backlog of cases and inadequate resources. The law provides for penalties for violations of the law and labor contracts, which are commensurate with those for other laws involving denials of civil rights, but the penalties were not an effective deterrent due to the inefficient functioning of the courts. Penalties were rarely applied against violators.

To establish a trade union, at least 30 percent of workers in an economic sector in a province must follow a registration process and obtain authorization from government officials. The law provides for the right to collective bargaining except in the civil service. The government labels many workers "essential," beyond those sectors defined as essential by the International Labor Organization (ILO), including the transport sector, communications, waste management and treatment, and fuel distribution. In exceptional circumstances involving national interests, authorities have the power to requisition workers in the essential services sector. While the law allows unions to conduct their activities without government interference, it also places some restrictions on their ability to strike. Before engaging in a strike, workers must negotiate with their employer for at least 20 days prior to a work stoppage. Should they fail to negotiate, the government may

deny the right to strike. The government may intervene in labor disputes that affect national security and energy sectors. Collective labor disputes are to be settled through compulsory arbitration by the Ministry of Public Administration, Labor, and Social Security (Ministry of Labor). The law prohibits employer retribution against strikers, but it does not contain effective measures to deter such retribution. The law permits the government to force workers back to work for “breaches of worker discipline” or participation in unauthorized strikes. Nonetheless, the law prohibits antiunion discrimination and stipulates that worker complaints should be adjudicated in the labor court. The Ministry of Labor had a hotline and two service centers in Luanda for workers who believed their rights had been violated. By law employers are required to reinstate workers who have been dismissed for union activities.

During the year, there were several strikes in the public and private sector concerning disputes between employers and workers. There were also allegations of retribution against strikers during the year. Between March and April, doctors undertook a 35-day strike after negotiations with the government for increased salaries and improved hospital conditions failed. The Angolan Doctor’s Union reported that the Ministry of Health, allegedly working with hospital directors, had suspended physicians’ salaries, prevented doctors from entering their workplaces to perform minimal services, and threatened to fire them.

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Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining were not generally respected. Government approval is required to form and join unions, which were hampered by membership and legalization matters. Labor unions, independent of those run by the government, worked to increase their influence, but the ruling MPLA party dominated the labor movement because of its historical close relationship with labor unions and from the strong financial base of the nation’s largest union, of which the MPLA was a part.

The government was the country's largest employer, and the Ministry of Labor mandated government worker wages with no negotiation with the unions. In 2020, President Lourenco created an advisory body, the Economic and Social Council, with 45 members representing large sectors of the country's society but did not include labor representatives. Public-sector labor unions used strikes and protests to advance labor rights. In January taxi drivers held a large strike to protest the administration's COVID-19 restrictions and political grievances.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits and criminalizes all forms of forced or compulsory labor. The government did not effectively enforce the law due in part to an insufficient number of inspectors and to systemic corruption.

Forced labor of adults occurred in fisheries, agriculture, construction, domestic service, and artisanal diamond-mining sectors, particularly in Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul Provinces. Migrant workers were subject to seizure of passports, threats, denial of food, and confinement. Forced child labor occurred (see section 7.c.). See also the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The labor law prohibits discrimination in employment and occupation based on race, color, sex, ethnic origin, country origin and social condition, religion, political opinion, union membership, disability, or language, and the government in general effectively enforced the law in the formal sector. The ILO, however, noted the law did not clearly define discrimination. The constitution prohibits all forms of discrimination. The country's law bans employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and criminalizes sexual harassment. The law provides for equal pay for equal work, but gender pay disparities existed. The law provides that both employers and workers be treated with respect. There were

legal restrictions on women's employment in occupations considered dangerous, in factories, and in industries such as mining, agriculture, and energy.

The law provides working mothers nine weeks of maternity leave and four weeks of prematernity leave before childbirth and one day of leave each month in the next 15 weeks after the birth, while working fathers receive leave on the day of the child's birth.

The government did not effectively enforce the law, although penalties, when applied, were commensurate with those for other laws related to civil rights. Penalties were sometimes applied, but there were no known prosecutions of official or private-sector gender-based discrimination in employment or occupation. Persons with disabilities found it difficult to gain access to public or private facilities, and it was difficult for such persons to participate in the education system and thus find employment. In the past, there were also complaints of discrimination against foreign workers. There were no known prosecutions for discrimination in employment. Penalties were not sufficient to deter violations.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: A minimum wage for the formal sector exists and varies by sector. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights raised concerns regarding the wide disparities of minimum wage by sector and the possibility this may undervalue work in women-dominated sectors. The lowest minimum wage was for agricultural work and was set below the UN Development Program's official line of poverty. The minimum wage for the formal sector may be updated annually or when the government assesses economic conditions warrant. The minimum wage law does not cover workers in informal sectors, such as street vendors and subsistence farmers.

The standard workweek in the private sector is 44 hours, while in the public sector it is 35 hours. In both sectors, the law mandates at least one unbroken period of 24 hours of rest per week. In the private sector, when employees engage in shift work or a variable weekly schedule, they may work up to 54 hours per week before the employer must pay overtime. In the formal sector, there is a prohibition on

excessive compulsory overtime, defined as more than two hours a day, 40 hours a month, or 200 hours a year. The law also provides for paid annual holidays. By law employers must provide, at a minimum, a bonus amounting to 50 percent of monthly salary to employees each year in December and an annual vacation. The law does not cover domestic workers, but a 2016 presidential decree extended some protections and enforcement standards to domestic workers. Workweek standards were not enforced unless employees filed a formal complaint with the Ministry of Labor. The law protects foreign workers with permanent legal status or a temporary work visa.

Occupational Safety and Health: Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards are required for all sectors of the economy. Employees have the right to remove themselves from hazardous working conditions without jeopardy to their employment.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The government effectively enforced the minimum wage law within the formal labor sector, and penalties were commensurate with those for similar infractions. The Ministry of Labor is charged with implementing and enforcing the law. An insufficient number of adequately trained labor inspectors hampered enforcement efforts. Inspectors have the authority to conduct unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions, but some companies received advance warning of impending labor inspections. The government did not always proactively enforce occupational safety and health standards nor investigate private company operations unless complaints were made by NGOs and labor unions.

Informal Sector: As much as 80 percent of the workforce was employed in the informal economy. The rate was higher in rural areas than urban areas (93 and 67 percent, respectively). Even in the country's rapidly growing urban areas, self-employed informal workers provided essential services such as water, food, and transportation. Other common types of informal work included agriculture, commerce and trading, domestic work, security guards, and raising cattle. The government began job skills training programs to reduce informal employment, as well as efforts to reduce barriers to formalization and promote greater awareness of the advantages and protection that come with the formalization.

Government regulation and closure of market stalls during COVID-19 forced many informal workers to set up shop in the streets, apartment building entrances, or their own doorsteps to sell food and handcrafts such as leather sandals, furniture, and imported goods. Informal markets were the main source of food for most of the population. Informal money changers operated a parallel financial system to exchange weak local currency for dollars. Some informal-sector workers joined unions, such as the National Federation of Unions of Food Industry, Commerce, and Hotels. Most workers in the informal sector and part-time workers were not covered by wage or occupational safety standards or social protections.